

Sin embargo, puede afirmarse que la recurrencia a tales estrategias contribuye, en función de la capacidad extrañante que desarrollan, a profundizar nuestra percepción de la realidad histórica en la que el universo de la ficción encuentra su anclaje; pese a que, como he señalado, estamos lejos de una crónica-documento, ese mundo rural y provinciano de los primeros cincuenta años de este siglo adquiere, junto a la peripecia personal del narrador y los avatares de su familia, una dimensión protagónica y actúa como elemento neutralizador del excesivo subjetivismo conectando la ficción a unas coordenadas históricas concretas cuya denuncia subyace con toda evidencia en la intencionalidad del texto.

Pienso, para concluir, que Egido ha logrado en esta novela esa difícil síntesis, característica de la gran literatura, por la que el material temático y el cauce formal en que lo vierte se fusionan en una unidad sin fisuras: la evocación elegíaca de ese pasado que constituye el núcleo articulador de la historia se vehicula en una estructura formal que, con su indeterminación cronológica, con sus obsesivas recurrencias temáticas y con la inconcreta ubicación espacio-temporal del narrador reproduce de modo fiel los mecanismos operativos de la memoria. Memoria que aparece metaforizada, además, en la casa cuyo proceso de construcción, intermitente, azaroso y nunca culminado, pauta el proceso narrativo.

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José Jiménez Lozano. *Las sandalias de plata*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1996.

Although José Jiménez Lozano has never described any deliberate connections between his novels, *Las sandalias de plata* may be read as the second volume of a trilogy composed by those works that immediately precede and follow it: *Teorema de Pitágoras* (1995) and *Los compañeros* (1997). The plots differ, but the themes of innocence, guilt, and the abuse of power prevail in all three novels, entrenching the author even further in his long-standing role of contemporary moralist.

The tone of the novel is set at the outset with the uncovering of human bones at a construction site. Their discovery and the decision to destroy them before any authority might delay the chalet's construction is both a cultural and literary *topos*, inducing the reader to intuit the various historical reasons behind their appearance (from a simple religious burial ground to the activities of the Civil War) and the many contemporary reasons for not wanting their existence publicized. As the plot grows in complexity, Jiménez Lozano's skeptical vision of contemporary Spain continues to make itself evident, as when, almost as an aside, don Abilio de la Herralde, patriarch and *cacique*, declares authoritatively that the post-Franco period will be as easy to manage as the Franco years, by simply continuing to offer to all parties what they desire, but always maintaining the economic differences between the rich and the poor.

The fourth chapter functions as a perfect example of Jiménez Lozano's novelistic discourse, with its innocent but all-knowing rural narrative voice, complex, quasi-incestuous genealogies, accent on detail, and an emphasis on the abuse of power in the Spanish countryside, which can be seen as an allegory of the abuse of power in general. Throughout the novel, this discourse is offset by the theme of the lasting power of the innocent, those who, while humble, embody truth, here found in the person of Blas Cívicos, a character the author has molded intertextually from Blasillo, the fool in Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*. The basic struggle in the novel, therefore, is between innocence and corruption, as it was between goodness and corruption in *Teorema de Pitágoras* and humility and vanity in *Los compañeros*.

Just as Blas is a continuation of Unamuno's character, so is the town a recreation of Valverde de Lucerna, although this fact is not necessary for an understanding of the novel. San Manuel appears consistently in Blas's recollections, however, with the same saintly character, as opposed to the perverted morals of the modern inhabitants of the town. Furthermore, the lake and the mountain, an allegory of the blood and body of Christ, among other things, in Unamuno's novel, are now the stamping grounds of a band of *maquis*, although these *maquis*, in line with the tone of the novel, are neither the heroic nor the tragic types that one finds in other works dedicated to that particular subject.

Blas Cívicos, who is retarded, remembers everything; he is the allegorical conscience of twentieth-century Spain, portrayed through the ethical and moral perversions of the rural population. Fittingly, after the death of Franco, his doctors recommend that he forget about the past, thus creating a cynical commentary on many Spaniards' desire to erase the divisions of the past in order to create a peaceful coexistence in the present.

As one might expect, the allegorical plot takes precedence over its referent towards the end of the novel, spinning out a surprise ending that brings the work to its conclusion. What also takes precedence is the rural ambience, made palpable not so much by description as by a narrative voice that Jiménez Lozano has long ago mastered, in his short stories, in *La salamandra*, and perhaps most of all in *Duelo en la casa grande*. The author's omnipresent moral, ethical, and political discourse has taken on new forms in his recent work, due to his desire to focus his criticism on current social and political ills that he refuses to tolerate, but the subtle persistence of characters and a narrator who, while representing the innocence of the underdog, also represent the insight of those who suffer, is what maintains the special qualities of this Castilian author's particular style.

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